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GILRUTH

required to test for them. They have since been adopted by the U.S. Air Force, the FAA and most countries. They are still used as the basic set of rules for acceptable flying machines.”

In 1952, Dr. Gilruth was appointed assistant director of the Langley Laboratory with the responsibility for directing research efforts in hypersonic aerodynamics at the Wallops Island Station and research in high-temperature structures and dynamic loads at the Langley Laboratory.

In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world’s first satellite, and set the stage for the space race that would drive the United States to seek its own position in space history.

By October 1958, NACA became the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). At that time, the United States put the wheels in motion for its own human space flight program and Gilruth was tapped to lead the organization. The Space Task Group, based at Langley Field, Va., would be the organization responsible for the design, development and flight operations of Project Mercury.

In the years ahead, Gilruth began to organize a diverse group of engineers that would be assembled in Houston to develop the nation’s Manned Spacecraft Center. In 1961, he became the director of that center and enabled our country to achieve one of its most glorious moments in history. Gilruth led the center, later renamed Johnson Space Center, for the next decade through 25

manned space flights including Alan Shepherd’s first Mercury flight in May 1961, the first lunar landing by Apollo 11 in July 1969, the dramatic rescue of Apollo 13 in 1970, and the Apollo 15 mission in July 1971.

During his tenure as MSC director, the center evolved into the heart of the U.S. space program where all flight

crew selection and training, and control of space flight missions takes place.

“There is no question that without Bob Gilruth there would not have been a Mercury, Gemini or an Apollo program,”

George Low, director of the Apollo lunar landing program, once commented during an interview. “He built it in terms of what he felt was needed to run a manned space flight program... it is clear to all who have been associated with him that he has been the leader of all that is manned space flight in this country.”

In January 1972, after retiring as director of the MSC, Gilruth became NASA’s director of Key Personnel Development, reporting to the deputy administrator in Washington, D.C.



Robert and Jo Gilruth

JSC Photo S91-30118

Gilruth, well known for his passion of boating and boatmaking, spent much of his spare time designing and building boats. He built the first successful sailing hydrofoil system and in 1973 completed the “Outrigger,” a 52-foot multihull sailboat he designed and built.

Gilruth achieved a long list of awards and honors. He was a member of the National Academy of Engineering; an Honorary Fellow in the American institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics; a Fellow in the American Astronautical Society; an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society; and a member of the International Academy of Astronautics.

Gilruth also received the prestigious Goddard Memorial Trophy of the National Rocket Club, the Louis W. Hill Space Transportation Award, the Reed Aeronautics Award and the National Aeronautical Association and National Aviation Club’s Robert J. Collier Trophy for “...the greatest achievement in

aeronautics and astronautics in America.”

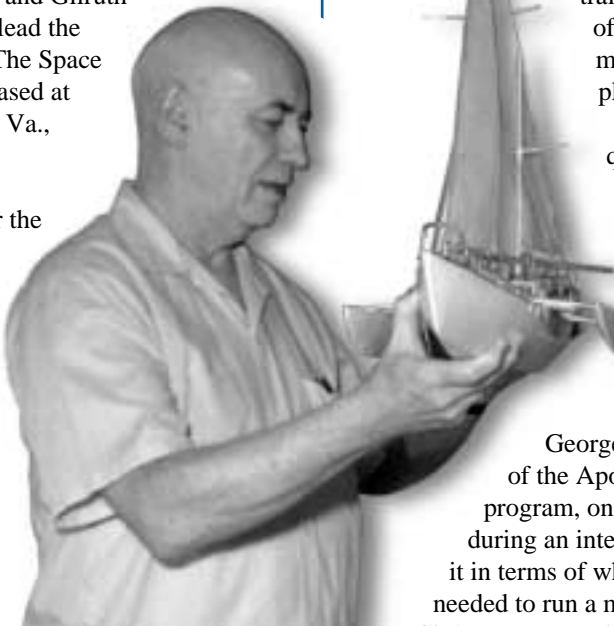
In April 1974, Gilruth was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences. He also received honorary doctoral degrees from the University of Minnesota, the Indiana Institute of Technology, George Washington University, Michigan Technological University, and New Mexico State University. Gilruth was one of the first people installed in the National Space Hall of Fame.

Gilruth is

survived by his wife Jo and daughter Barbara Jean Wyatt. ■

“*The most challenging task of all was when he came here. He wanted to do this for the pride of our country and because it was a challenge and he really knew that these people were the ones who were going to make it work. And when it was successful, he was very proud because the pride of our country had been restored and he was proud that he had been a part of it.*

—Mrs. Jo Gilruth



NASA JSC Photo S96-16689



NASA JSC Photo 2000-06015 by Robert Markowitz
Family, friends and longtime associates pay tribute to Gilruth’s memory by planting a tree in the Memorial Grove on the JSC grounds. The day’s observances concluded with a “missing man” fly-over by NASA astronauts.

“*Dad was endlessly curious – always making or inventing things. His ingenuity knew no bounds. I never saw him stumped... There was no plan unthinkable. No dream out of reach.*

—Barbara Jean Wyatt

*In the dark immensity of night,
I stood upon a hill and watched the light
of a star soundless and beautiful and far.*

*A scientist standing there with me said,
‘It is not the star you see, but a glow
that left the star light years ago.’*

*Men are like stars in a timeless sky.
The light of a good man’s life shines high
golden and splendid, long after his
brief life years are ended.*

—Author unknown

Poem read by Barbara Jean Wyatt at the memorial service